

The CASE of the Royal-African Company.

AS the Importation of Negroes from the Coast of *Guinea*, for cultivating and improving our *West-India* Plantations, has been found indispensably necessary, ever since any considerable Colonies of Her Majesty's Subjects have settled in *America*: So likewise, ever since Her Majesty's Subjects got the first footing on the Coast of *Africa*, they found it necessary (after the Example of all other Nations) to trade thither by Companies, with exclusive Joint-Stocks, one after another, from time to time; and have endeavour'd, all along to erect Forts and Settlements, with consent of the Natives, for the Security, Preservation and Improvement of their Trade: But none of these Companies being ever establish'd with the Sanction of a Parliamentary Constitution, a Door was always left open, for frequently disturbing their Measures, embarrassing their Designs, and interrupting the Progress of their Trade and Acquisitions; and that chiefly upon account of a divided Interest, which has been always, more or less, kept up among our selves, both at Home and Abroad; insomuch, that at several periods of time, needless to be here mention'd, our Trade to *Africa* has been, oftner than once, wholly relinquish'd, for some Years together, by reason of the Intrusion and irregular Proceedings of Interlopers, and the destructive Consequences which Divisions never fail to produce in any such Undertakings.

Yet after the present *Royal-African-Company* was, in the Year 1672, established by a new Charter, with exclusive Privileges, and had the Countenance and Protection of the Government at the time; with few or no Interruptions, for a course of some Years together; (which in effect answered then all the Ends of a Parliamentary Constitution) they purchas'd, erected, maintain'd and repair'd a considerable Number of Forts, Factories and Settlements on the Coast of *Africa*; they contracted many Alliances with the Natives, and renewed the same, from time to time, according as the Circumstances of their Affairs required; they introduc'd and encourag'd the making several sorts of Woollen and other Manufactures, proper for the Trade of *Guinea*, not formerly manufactur'd in *England*, and reduc'd the making thereof to a staple and settled Goodness: They Exported yearly upwards of 70000 Pounds worth of the said Woollen and other Manufactures; and gave far better Prices for the same than what usually is now given for the like. They furnish'd the Western Plantations with constant Supplies of considerable Numbers of Negroes at very moderate Rates; the Produce of whose Labour has added very much to the publick Revenue and Riches of this Kingdom; they imported considerable quantities of Gold-Dust, Elephants-Teeth, Redwood, and other Goods fit for being manufactured at Home; and in effect managed Matters so, both Abroad and at Home, as that, for several Years together, their Trade did not only produce an Annual Dividend of certain Profits, to all the particular Adventurers in the Joint-Stock, besides a Multiplication of their Capital, but, likewise several other Publick and National Advantages to the whole Kingdom, and the *British* Plantations in general.

From all which it may be rationally concluded, that if the present Company's Charter had been confirm'd, by Act of Parliament, so as to have prevented the many Obstructions and Difficulties, which they have been forced to struggle with, these twenty Years last past, the *British* Interest on the Coast of *Africa*, had been, by this time, in a much more flourishing Condition than can possibly be consistent with a precarious Constitution, which admits of all the pernicious Consequences that must naturally attend a divided Interest, especially in a Trade where we have all the Stratagems and united Power of such formidable Foreign Competitors as the *French*, *Dutch*, *Danes*, *Brandenburgers*, *Portuguese*, *Natives*, &c. to deal with.

However, it so happened, that soon after the Revolution, the Interlopers breaking in upon the Privileges of the *Royal-African-Company*'s Chatter; and thereafter the Parliament being, in the Year 1697. induced, for an Experiment, to grant a Permission to all His Majesty's Subjects, as well as the Company, to trade to and from *Africa*, for the space of 13 Years, they paying to the Company a Duty of ten per Cent upon their Exports, towards defraying the Charge and Expences of their Forts and Settlements in those Parts; the Trade has ever since fallen into great Disorders and Confusions: For,

I. The unbounded Liberty allowed, by the said Act, to all Persons whatsoever, to trade to *Africa*, without any uniform Influence, or Pre-concerted Rules of Management, has render'd the *British* Interest on that Coast so divided, and the Consequences attending the different Methods of trading there so precarious, that the Natives of *Africa* have thereby an opportunity of imposing what they please, as well upon the separate Traders, as upon the Company, to the general Prejudice of this Kingdom; insomuch that, since the Commencement of the Liberty allow'd by the said Act, the Prices of Goods and Merchandizes imported into *Guinea*, are diminished to at least the one half of what they produc'd formerly, and also the Prices of Negroes are advanced to much more than the double, treble, yea and frequently the quadruple of their former Prices: Which evidently proceeds from the Advantage which the Natives take of their having variety of Chap-men; where-



as before, they could have recourse only to the Company's Settlements and Warehouses; and thereby the advantage of the Trade, in all its Branches, kept always on our Side, which in the many happy Consequences thereof diffus'd it self through the whole Circle of the Trade of this Kingdom.

II. Our Foreign Rivals in this Commerce do, upon all Occasions, foment and encourage those Divisions which must unavoidably happen betwixt Traders who have different Interests; and they instruct the Natives how to make their Advantage from thence, because these our Foreign Competitors do hope that, if all *British* Adventurers be once discourag'd, so as to relinquish their Forts and Settlements, the former may engross this Traffick wholly to themselves; and they are so bent upon their own Profit, that they not only instigate the Natives chiefly against the *Royal-African-Company* (as their most formidable and puissant Competitor) but have likewise, in Conjunction with their Native Allies, frequently endeavour'd to extirpate and destroy the *British* Commerce there, as the *Dutch* did the *English* Factories in the *Spice-Islands*, and other parts of *India*, which could never be regain'd.

III. Tho' the Novelty of a Constitution laying the Trade to *Africa* open by Law, did at first tempt many inconsiderate Persons, who knew little or nothing of the Nature and Circumstances of that Trade, to adventure their Stocks in trading separately to *Africa*; insomuch, that in one Year they sent Eighty one Vessels thither; yet their Losses and Disappointments, for the Reasons already given, have been such, for some Years last past, they have not sent out above one fifth of that number of Ships *per annum*; so that it may justly be said, that they have not only done themselves and the Company too, abundance of Damage; but have likewise been the Instruments of endangering the total loss of that Trade to the Nation. Yea, let them send out whatever number of Ships they will, yet still, without a pre-concerted and uniform Management (which can never be but in the Method of an exclusive Joint-Stock) not only the present Company, but even the Nation, yea, and the generality of all the separate Traders themselves, must unavoidably of course loose by the Trade, as they have done all along, excepting only some few who have the sole benefit of Commissions and Commission-houses.

IV. The Company labouring, all this time, under the pressure of so many unsurmountable Difficulties and Discouragements, by reason of frequent Captures, and most injurious Combinations against them, both at Home and Abroad, were still nevertheless forced to be at a continued vast Charge and Expence in maintaining their Forts and Settlements, and keeping up the Face of a Trade, until they could have a fair Opportunity of laying their Case before the Parliament: But finding it impracticable for either themselves or the separate Traders to Trade profitably on the foot of the present loose and precarious Constitution, have not traded for near so much as otherways they would have done: So that the Planters in *America* do grievously complain that, these six or seven Years past, the Company and separate Traders together have not supplied them with sufficient Numbers of Negroes, and that these they get do cost them more than double, and frequently treble the prices which they formerly paid for them.

V. By the aforesaid Means, the Company was at last brought under the grievous hardship of a most perplexing Dilemma; the more they traded for, the more (in all probability) they were sure to lose; and if they desisted from trading for good and all, then they must not only expect to lose all hopes of ever recovering those vast Sums which they had formerly advanced, from time to time, for the Security, Preservation and Improvement of the Trade; but even the very foundation thereof (their Forts and Settlements) fall to the Ground, or which is worse, into the Hands of Foreign Nations, and thereby lie under the undelible Reproach of suffering the whole Trade to be irrecoverably lost to this Kingdom: The Consideration whereof made the Company renew their Endeavours, by borrowing and advancing many additional considerable Sums, from time to time, for the Maintenance and Preservation of these Forts and Settlements, and consequently of the Trade it self, at a very great and endless Expence, till some favourable opportunity should offer for redressing their Grievances, as aforesaid. In order to which, they made their Application by Petition to the Honourable House of Commons in the last Sessions of Parliament: But since some few separate Traders did so alarm and disturb the Deliberations of the Honourable House with clamorous and most injurious Calumnies, and groundless Aspersions against the Managers of the Company, charging them with a pretended Monopoly of the Trade, doing horrid Injustice both to the Adventurers and Creditors of the Company, &c. that tho' they then sufficiently vindicated themselves, yet the Sessions drawing to a Close, the further Consideration of their Petition was delayed for that time.

But since the last Sessions of Parliament the Managers of the Company, by exposing all their Books and Proceedings, together with the present State of both their Quick and Dead Stock, at several general Meetings of the Adventurers and Creditors, both jointly and separately, have so far convinced all Parties concern'd, of the fairness and equality of their Actions for the preservation of their Common Interest in general, on the Coast of *Africa*, that four fifths of their said Creditors have already subscribed to an Agreement, by which the Company will be intirely freed and discharged from their whole Debts, and then want nothing but only suitable Encouragement from the Parliament for enabling them

them to carry on and improve the Trade to a much more Publick and National Advantage than can possibly, with any tolerable shew of Reason, be ever expected from any loose and open Method whatsoever.

The Company having thus in a great Measure extricated themselves out of the Labyrinth, into which they were involved, upon account of the great Debts which they had contracted, for the preservation and maintenance of the Trade to the Nation, 'tis hop'd that the Wisdom of the Parliament will find it necessary and expedient to disengage them likewise at this time from the intolerable dead weight and incumbrance of that unrestrained liberty given to separate Traders, which has already produced so many obnoxious and pernicious Consequences; not only to the Company, but even to the *African* Trade in general: The doing whereof will yet appear to be so much the more reasonable and necessary at this Juncture, if the Honourable House will be pleas'd to consider the few following Propositions and Matters of Fact.

First. That there was never yet any substantial Commerce in the World carried on but by means of mutual Alliances and Confederations made with the Natives, how barbarous soever. And it is manifest, that Alliances of this Nature can be made only by Princes themselves, or by Powers derived from them, to Bodies-Politick and Communities; who are Stable, Permanent and Responsible, continually ready upon the Place, by their Agents, to expostulate with, or give Satisfaction to their Allies: Which can never be mantain'd with Individuals or single Persons, who being transient and mortal; no Man knows where to find them, when they happen to commit any Injuries.

Secondly, Without some fixt Society, vested with a considerable Joint-Stock, and suitable Priviledges, there can be no sure Dependance upon having the *British* Plantations supplied duly with sufficient Numbers of Negroes, at moderate or certain Rates; nor upon making any advantageous Contracts with the *Spaniards*, or *Portuguese*, to furnish them with Negroes in their *West-Indies*: Which if duly improved, in the Hands of a Company having the sole Management of the Trade to *Africa*, might very easily be made to produce a large and valuable yearly Article in the Ballance of our Foreign Trader; so that, under the wild Notion of keeping the Trade open to Millions of People who never trad-ed, nor will ever trade to *Africa*, in any Method whatsoever; upwards of 1000 Adventurers immediately concern'd in the Company's Stock, besides several Thousands of Her Majesty's Subjects that might have been daily employ'd, by the Company, if establish'd upon the foot of a suitable Constitution, are all this time (to the universal los-ses of the Nation, in the Consequences thereof) most greviously discourag'd; while the little Shadow that remain'd of the Trade is in effect a most pernicious Monopoly in the Hands of ten or twelve Separate Traders who, plowing (as it were) with the Company's Heifer, on the Coast of *Guinea*, have the sole Benefit of Commissions and Commission-Houses, in the Plantations. But it is our great Misfortune that (generally speaking) we have as narrow and contracted Notions and Ideas of the indefinite Number of un-common Circumstances attending the *African* Trade, as we have of our Coal-Trade bet-wixt this and *New-Castle*, or indeed of all the Linnen-Drapers-Shops between *Aldgate* and *Temple-Bar*; as if the Management of both the one and the other were, neither more nor less, the very same, in all Events whatsoever.

Thirdly, 'Tis very observable that all the Attempts ever made of Trading from hence, either to the *East-Indies* or Coast of *Africa*, in the Method of an open Trade, have prov'd always abortive; For while the Trade to the *East-Indies* lay open from the Year 1653, to the Year 1657, that Method proved so very destructive to the several private Traders thither; that the governing Power, at that time, found it necessary to unite them all into one Joint-Company, with a Joint-Stock; and tho' in the Year 1698, an Act of Parliament was obtain'd for laying that Trade open, in the Method of a regulated Company; yet upon Tryal, the Separate Traders who procured that Act, found it ne-cessary to unite themselves, so as to trade only with one Joint-Stock: And tho' there was seemingly an irreconcileable Contest between the new and old Company, yet both of them became so sensible of the destructive Consequences of Trading by a divided Inter-est, that they are now at last happily join'd into one Company, having the same Joint-Stock, Interest and Designs. It is to be remembred likewise, that while the Trade to *Africa* was laid open, before the Restauration of King *Charles II.* the *Dutch* Com-pany took such Advantages of the Separate Traders, that their Losses were computed to about 300000*l.* as appear'd by their Petitions to the King: Which induced His Ma-jesty to grant an exclusive Charter in the Year 1662 to the present Company's Pre-decessors; who having sustain'd great Losses by the then succeeding *Dutch* War, before they were scarcely well establish'd; His Majesty found it Necessary for the Recovery and Preservation of the Trade, to renew that Charter in Favour of the present Royal-*African*-Company; they paying an Equivalent to their Predecessors for the surrend-er of their Right, &c.

From the Consideration of all which Premisses, and the constant Practice and Expe-rience of all other *European* Nations Trading to *Africa*, 'tis humbly hoped that the Ho-nourable House of Commons may think it necessary and expedient, in the present Jun-ture, to come to some certain and determinate Resolutions in Relation to that Trade; such as these following, or the like:

- 1st. That the Preservation and Improvement of the Trade to Africa, is a matter of very high importance to this Kingdom, and the Plantations thereunto belonging.
- 2d. That Forts and Settlements on the Coast, and Alliances with the Natives, are absolutely necessary for the Defence, Preservation and Improvement of that Trade.
- 3d. That, by any any other Method, than that of a Joint-Stock, with exclusive Privileges, the said Forts, Settlements and Alliances, can never be effectually maintain'd, and the said Trade carried on, so as to be made an advantageous Trade to Britain.

And as it is humbly presum'd that, upon the Foot of a suitable Constitution, no Sett of Men in *Britain* are now so capable of answering all the Ends of the aforesaid Resolutions, or can be so justly entitled to the Trade of the Coast of *Africa*, as the present Royal-African-Company; to whose Industry, Care and Application, the Recovery, Preservation and Improvement of *Britain's* Share of the Trade, is wholly owing; so (with all due Submission to the Wisdom of the Parliament) the most easy, natural and effectual way of putting an end, at once, to the Divisions and Strugglings of the several contending Parties, as to the Method of Settling the aforesaid Trade, at this time, would be to confirm the Company's Charter by Act of Parliament; with such further provisional Clauses for encreasing the Export and Consumption of our *British* Manufactures and supplying the Plantations with sufficient Numbers of Negroes at moderate Prices, as the Wisdom of the Parliament shall judge fit and reasonable.

Then it should be (and not till then) that, from the natural Consequences of such a happy Constitution, we might reasonably expect the several following Advantages.

1st. An End to all our Litigious Debates and divided interfering Interests in the Trade, both at Home and Abroad.

2d. No room or handle left for the poisonous Practices of the Emissaries and Partizans of Foreign Interests; in our own Bosoms, either here or on the Coast of *Africa*.

3d. No Pretence or Temptation left for the Company's Servants to be Treacherous to their Masters, by Colleaguing with those of different Interests, and sending home the Company's Effects Clandestinely in private Traders Ships; but all Parties concern'd bound by Interest, and Inclination, to pursue the same generous Ends, for the common Interest of the Company and the whole Nation in General.

4th. A certain yearly Export of considerable Quantities of *British* Manufactures, and a suitable Import of Gold, Elephants-Teeth, Dye-Wood, &c. besides a constant supply of Negroes to the Plantations at moderate Prices.

5th. The *British* Interest so fortified and improved in *Africa*, that they could easily overtop and defeat all the Stratagems and Designs of their Enemies there, and gradually extend their Power, Dominion and Trade along the Coast, to the unspeakable Advantage and Credit of this Kingdom.

6th. The Adventurers projecting all the reasonable ways by which they might improve and extend their Interest at Home, so as to communicate the Advantages of their Trade in the most diffusive manner to all the considerable Ports in *Britain*; whereas the Trade is now almost confin'd to the Port of *London* only.

7th. The Plantations rejoicing at the Abatement which they would gradually find in the Prices of the Negroes; besides their being at a certainty as to the Party against whom they might exhibit their Complaints; in Case they met with any Disappointments or hard Usage.

8th. A considerable part of the Treasure of the *Spanish* and *Portuguese West-Indies*, circulating here in return for such Numbers of Slaves as the Company would furnish them with, after settling the *Asiento*.

9th. The Company making considerable yearly Dividends of part of their Profits, besides the Multiplication of their Capital Stock.

10th. Many Thousands of Hands employed and comfortably maintain'd by the Company's Trade, both at Home and Abroad, besides those employed in Shipping and Navigation.